

Don't Leave Me by Janaynay

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, F/M, Short One Shot, Slice of Life, They love each other so much, dont hate me, dont worry this isnt the end, growing older, i might add to it, im sorry, im trash for them, pls dont read if you dont like angst, quiet moments together, they really love each other okay?, this is kinda emo

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Summary:

"Don't leave me."

"Never."

Or, the 5 times El said it, and the 1 time Mike did.

1. July, 1989

July, 1989

The air was warmer than it was the last time they did this.

El stood in front of him, looking up at him with teary eyes, the tension in the air so palpable you could nearly see it. Mike felt it everywhere, crushing his heart, his lungs, behind his eyes as tears threatened but did not spill. He felt 13 all over again, standing in front of the girl he loved, the fear of losing her too much to bear and yet all too real and at hand.

A tear slipped out.

"Be careful," he croaked. "I-I can't..."

She lifted up on her toes and silenced him with a firm kiss, her lips wet with her own tears. "You won't," she breathed out, pressing her forehead to his, locking an arm around his neck. "You won't. I promise."

Her words brought him as much comfort as they did the first time, which was not much at all. His hands trembled and his heart clenched within his chest as panic took hold.

"Don't," he gripped her waist with shaking hands. "Don't leave me."

She sighed, a broken sound, and Mike let himself feel hopeful for a moment. But she soon pulled back slightly, and he swore he heard his heart crack in two within his chest.

She removed his hands from her hips and held them tightly in her own, pressing the backs against her cheeks, sighing again, a pained expression on her face.

"I have to, Mike. You know I do."

He wanted to pull away from her, to show her how upset he was with her, but he couldn't. Not when her fingers were tangled with his and her cheek felt so warm against his hand and she was looking at him

with caramel eyes he had memorized, eyes that saw through him into the deepest parts of his soul and loved him anyway.

He swallowed and nodded, cementing just how 13 he felt, lamenting that the passage of time hadn't made him stronger, but more afraid. More afraid to lose her, and he had so much more to lose.

"I love you, Mike."

"I love you, too, El. So much."

And then she was gone, and she took her warmth with her, his hands cold without her touch. But the tension that crushed his heart and lungs and pushed tears from his eyes remained.

Hours later, she would echo his own words back to him, terror in her eyes, blood caked to her face, her knuckles white as they clutched onto his arms. "Don't leave me," she begged, her voice desperate, the sound of chaos all around them dulled to a mere distant hum when their focus was on each other.

Mike didn't even look at the danger around them, but kept his gaze locked on her face, his voice firm and gentle. "Never," he said.

A tear slipped out.

Notes for the Chapter:

Don't hate me.

2. September, 1995

September, 1995

Mike was scared.

El's hair was slick with sweat, her eyes squeezed shut with the effort of trying not to scream. He had never seen her like this, in this amount of pain, so in control and out of control all at once. It might have been fascinating to see how much she could internalize without destroying the room, but Mike just found it terrifying. Terrifying, and utterly heartbreaking.

He felt useless, seeing her like this. It was a constant narrative in their lives - her pain and his inability to do anything. El would argue that he did help, always, and that he saved her just as much as she saved him, but Mike couldn't deny how he felt conflicted much of the time - both in awe of her strength and irritated by his own weakness.

Despite her strength she looked so vulnerable, so small laying there in her hospital gown, and he focused on her damp curls to get the image of a shorn, skinny child with a number for a name out of his head.

His hands twitched, tired of being idle, desperate to comfort her, sooth her, heal her. He reached for her and she reared back in pain, his arms jerking back halfway and running through his hair in frustration, causing it to stand up in every direction. A moment later she reached for him with both hands. He responded instantly, cradling her gently in his arms, like she was made of glass and might break.

"Mike," she half whispered, her voice hoarse from silent screams.

"El, what can I do? How can I help you? Please."

"You can't-" she inhaled sharply and tightened her grip on his hand and he held in a cry at the pain. "Just, stay here, please."

"Promise," he said, and kissed her head, his racing heart slowing

down at her closeness. He felt her relax, her weight pressing into him more and more, and he felt grounded for the first time in hours.

The monitor suddenly made a shrill noise, and it shot a chill down Mike's spine as he held his limp wife in his arms.

"El!" He shook her, and her eyes rolled before focusing on him. "El!"

She blinked at him, half-conscious, but the monitor continued its warning sound.

Mike leaped to his feet and started toward the door, ready to yell for help when suddenly an iron-like grip held him in place.

"Mike!" He turned around to see her frantic eyes, now wide open and wild, full of tears. "Mike, I'm scared!"

"I'm scared too," he said, "and I'm getting a doctor."

He turned to leave but she held him in place.

"No! Mike, don't, please."

"El, I have to get help--"

"Mike," she pleaded, her eyes glistening. "Don't leave me."

His heartbeat was in his ears, keeping time with the beeps of the monitor, and nearly everything in him told him to turn around and get help. But her eyes held him, and before he knew it he was moving towards her, his fingers slipping into her hair, palm cradling her jaw. "Never," he breathed, pressing his forehead against hers.

A tear rolled down her cheek, and he gently kissed it away. Holding her with one arm, he pushed on the call button so hard his fingertips went white.

Hours later, a cry pierced the air as his wife, who opened portals to other worlds and flipped vans into the air with her mind, did the most amazing and powerful thing Mike had ever seen her do.

"Its a girl!" the doctor announced, lifting a wailing, pink form

carefully in the air before giving her to her mom.

Mike looked at the tiny thing in El's arms and knew his life would never be the same. El looked at him, and he was blown away. She had never looked more beautiful - hair disheveled, eyes tired but radiant, shining with emotion. He had never loved her more than he did in that moment. He felt his own eyes well the longer he looked at her.

"Come and meet her, dad," El said, finally, looking away from Mike to gaze down at the bundle in her arms.

Dad.

3. December, 2010

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm sorry.

December, 2010

The air was colder than the last time they did this.

El stood beside him, stone faced, staring straight ahead, eyes unseeing. Her mitten clad hands were clenched into fists at her sides and though she was right next to Mike, she felt a million miles away.

Snow crunched beneath their feet and a bitter wind nipped at their noses and cheeks, leaving them raw and red.

Mike shifted his weight, turning towards El slightly to get out of the wind, but like the granite stones surrounding them, El was unmoved. Her wall was still up. He opened his mouth to speak but quickly clamped it shut again. He had nothing to say, nothing to offer that hadn't been said before, and he cursed his own inadequacy.

It was perhaps for the best, though, for at that moment she spoke, her voice cutting through the silence and distance between them.

"I'm so angry," she said, her voice hoarse from misuse. She still hadn't moved to look at him.

"I know."

Her eyes bore into the rock in front of them as she spoke. "I'm still so - I'm so furious. I thought I'd be sad today but I'm too angry to be sad."

Mike said nothing but shifted closer to her, wanting to be there for her while still giving her space; as though closing the physical space between them could also bring her back to him from where she was today, so far away.

"This just - it isn't fair! He's supposed to be here!" Tears rolled down

her face, hot and angry. "I shouldn't have to say this here," she said, gesturing around the graveyard. "I should be able to say Merry Christmas to his face. At his house, with his stupid beard and Christmas sweater..."

"I know," Mike said again, at a loss of what to say, his own tears leaving tracks down his cheeks. He looked at the headstone El had yet to take her eyes off of: *Jim Hopper, 1942-2010. Loving husband, dad, and grandfather.*

"I miss him so much," El said, and her shoulders slumped, her angry resolve giving way to grief.

"Me too," Mike said in earnest, his voice thick with emotion.

El looked at him for the first time since they arrived, and her face crumpled. Mike's emotion broke something in her, and she turned and threw herself into his arms.

He eagerly responded, wrapping her up tightly, pulling her as close to him as their winter clothes would allow. She clutched his back and sobbed into his chest while he rubbed circles in the centre of her back, letting her cry as much as she needed to.

After a few moments her sobs quieted, and they settled into the hug. El turned to face the headstone again, her head pressed to Mike's chest, sniffing as she said, "Merry Christmas, dad. We love you."

"We love you," Mike echoed, keeping El close in his arms.

They were silent for a moment. El sighed, and then shivered. "We should probably go."

"Only if you're ready," Mike said.

"I'm ready now," she said, looping her arm through his and hugging it tightly.

Despite the cold, they took their time walking back to the car, wandering slowly, arms linked and heads together.

They didn't speak again until they were in the car. Mike started the

car and was warming his hands by the air vent when suddenly El gripped his arm. He looked at her, and though she had new lines around her eyes, she looked so much like the girl he fell in love with all those years ago. It was her eyes, her honey eyes, always so openly showing what she was feeling, that looked at him with such openness and love - those eyes never changed, nor did the way they looked at him.

"I love you," she said simply.

"I love you too, El. So much."

Her hand moved from his arm to his face. "Don't leave me," she whispered.

His heart leapt in his chest and he felt a lump form in his throat. He knew what she meant, and that he shouldn't - *couldn't* - promise her that. And yet he found himself leaning into her touch and vowing, "Never."

He didn't resist as she pulled his face towards hers, her soft lips cold but comforting on his own.

Hours later, surrounded by family and scattered wrapping paper, they would find comfort in the clasp of small hands in their own, in cheery carols and cups of eggnog, and in the quiet strength of Joyce, who carried on as they all had to do. And they would find comfort in each other, like they always did and always would.

Together, always together.

Notes for the Chapter:

Don't hate me.

4. June, 2020

Notes for the Chapter:

This one is so much fluffier than the others. Enjoy.

June, 2020

Mike was exhausted.

The bliss that was taking off his dress shoes and burying his feet into the soft carpet of their living room could not possibly be topped at this moment. El evidently felt the same, sighing in relief the second her high heels were off.

Mike had sat down in the arm chair, which was clearly a bad idea because he now doubted he would ever find the motivation to physically get out of it. El was at the kitchen counter, pouring a glass of water for herself, freeing her hair from the updo it had been pinned into, curls pouring down her back.

Mike sucked in a breath at the sight. She was still so incredibly beautiful - more beautiful every year, if it was even possible. He was the luckiest man in the entire universe. His arms were suddenly itching to hold her. If he had more energy, he'd get out of this chair and -

His thoughts were interrupted by his wife abruptly dropping into his lap, satisfying his unspoken desire.

"Oh, I shouldn't have sat down, I can tell now I'll never be able to stand again," El said, sinking into Mike comfortably. Mike smiled and wrapped his arms around her waist, propping his chin onto her shoulder.

"That was a long day. Long, but good," El sighed.

"The good news is we don't have to do that for a long time. Not until the grandkids are old enough to get married, anyway," Mike said.

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Mike. Our youngest just got

married, and I'm too young to be a grandma."

Mike couldn't hold back a smile at the thought. "You'd be the best grandma ever," he sighed happily, giving her a squeeze.

"Hmm," was all El said in reply, but she snuggled deeper into him.

El looked around the room, which was thankfully in good order. The back yard, however, was a mess. It had been the perfect location for their son and new daughter in law's reception, but it was going to require a few hours of work to return to normal.

"Did you blow out the candles on the head table?" she asked quietly, her voice tired.

"I did," he said, stifling a yawn. "Max said to leave everything else where it was. They want to come help us out tomorrow."

"Okay," El said, her eyes continuing their overview of the room, before landing on the picture of Hop on the mantel and going silent.

Mike felt her tense slightly and tightened his grip on her waist, pulling her close. "He would have loved it," he said, dropping a kiss onto her shoulder.

She nodded and gave a small smile. "Yes, he really would have."

They were quiet for a few moments, too tired to move or speak.

"El, I think we have to go to bed," Mike said after a while. "I think I dozed off there for a minute, and as comfortable as I am here I don't think we'll appreciate having slept in our dress clothes in the morning."

El yawned in reply. "Okay. I'm getting up." She didn't move, however, causing Mike to gently poke her in the ribs. She flinched, but stayed on his lap, trapping him on the chair. "I don't want to," she whined, turning to bury her face in his neck.

Mike chuckled a bit, rubbing her back. "Come on, El. Bedtime."

"Stay here," she mumbled, burrowing even further, wrapping her

arms around his neck. "S'nice."

Mike contemplated letting her have her way. But his belt was starting to dig in, and his teeth were begging to be brushed, and his comfortable bed was just down the hall. So without further debate, he scooped El up into his arms, stood, and began carrying her down the hall.

"You're nice," she murmured into his neck.

"And you're adorable," he said in return, laying her gently on their bed and planting a kiss on her forehead.

El woke a few hours later, feeling groggy, slightly disoriented, and unable to be in her dress clothes a moment longer.

She slipped out of the bed and changed quickly into soft pyjamas, tossing her dress over a chair to deal with tomorrow. She glanced over at Mike, sleeping serenely, and smiled before brushing his hair off his forehead in a tender gesture.

She made her way down the hall to the bathroom, where she washed her face and brushed her teeth. On her way back to bed, she glanced in the doorway of their daughter's room - now long vacated, other than on holidays and visits - and then her son's room. Her baby boy, now a newly married man. Her feet came to a stop, and before she knew it, she was perched on the edge of his bed, looking around the room in the dim light.

A soft creak behind her let her know of Mike's presence, and she turned to see him leaning in the doorway.

"Sorry, did I wake you up?"

"No. Well, you know how it is. I don't sleep well when you're not there," he said. He gestured at the room, "Feels a little empty tonight, doesn't it?"

El bit her lip, feeling her eyes tear up. "Yeah. Wasn't it just yesterday he was playing trains in here? Or calling us in because he had a bad dream?"

Mike smiled a sad smile. "It feels like it."

El let out a ragged breath. "I'm so proud of him. Of both our kids. We did good, Mike."

"We did," he said, coming to sit next to her. "We took care of them, and now we get to let them go, as hard as it is."

El wrung her hands together in her lap. "I'm happy for them, but sometimes I wish they didn't have to leave us and grow up."

Mike wrapped an arm around her, and she leaned her head on his shoulder. "I know," he said.

"Mike?"

"Yeah, El?"

"Don't leave me," she whispered, feeling slightly embarrassed and foolish for saying this now.

Mike pulled her closer to his side, planting a kiss on her temple. "Never," he answered, as he always did. "You're stuck with me for life, I'm afraid."

El smiled at that. "Promise?"

"Promise. The kids might need you in a different way, but I will always need you, El."

El wrapped her arms around his waist in response, holding him tightly in a silent thank you. He always knew what to say, always knew what she needed. She could never be without him.

They stayed there a while, but then El yawned, which made Mike yawn too, reminding them of the hour and sending them back to their bed, hands clasped together both on the way to their room and remaining so throughout the night.

Hours later, surrounded by their best and lifelong friends (Max brought coffee - bless her), they tackled the back yard, turning it back into something that was theirs. The day marked another

transition in their ever-changing lives, but they knew they'd face this and the ones to come the way they always did - together. Always together.

Notes for the Chapter:

One left! Brace yourselves. And thank you for you kind comments and for reading this story.

5. November, 2062

Notes for the Chapter:

I cried 3 times writing this. Thank you for reading this story.

November, 2062

Mike was awake.

After sleeping for two days straight, giving El and his family the fright of their life, Mike woke up, alert and famished. The care home's staff quickly got to work, checking his vitals and making sure he got the meal he wanted.

He had eaten a large portion of hamburger steak and mashed potatoes and visited with his children and grandchildren, and even held his newest great grandson.

He was glad to see them, but was clearly most excited to see El, hardly able to keep his gaze off her. She was no better, glued to the side of his bed, hand either in his or smoothing the hair from his face, smiling with worry in her eyes.

He had begun to tire again, and his family had taken their leave. El remained in her designated spot by the bed, only moving so the nurse could check on him - which was currently driving Mike crazy.

"When are you going to stop pestering me so I can have a minute alone with my wife?" Mike grumbled.

"I'll be out of your hair in a moment," the nurse said, before clicking her tongue at him in warning. "Now, Mr. Wheeler, you behave yourself, alright? We can't have your heart rate getting up so high again."

"No promises," Mike said, gazing serenely at his wife. "My heart's always beating fast when she's close to me. Always has."

El smiled, holding his palm to her cheek, and the nurse clutched her

own heart in response.

"Oh, Mr. Wheeler, if my Brad was only half as romantic as you are..." she said as she left the room, closing the door behind her.

Mike looked at El and patted the bed beside him. "Join me?"

El nodded and squeezed his hand.

"Where are the kids?" Mike asked suddenly, glancing around the room.

"They left to take the little ones home for the night. They said goodbye to you, remember?"

"Oh, yes, right, I remember."

El sat on the edge of the bed before slowly laying down and with great effort, turning so they were face to face.

"Hi," Mike breathed, eyes roaming over her face.

El met his gaze. "Hi."

Mike glanced over her face again like he was memorizing it. "Still as beautiful as the day I met you."

"Mike," El scolded. "That's not a very nice compliment. I was a mess when you met me."

"No you weren't," he insisted. "You've always been beautiful to me. Promise."

A lump formed in El's throat and she smiled at him warmly. She smoothed a lock of his hair on his temple, thick and unruly as ever, now a shining silver colour. She looked into his chocolate eyes, still so warm and dark despite the wrinkles around them. "You are, too."

Mike closed his eyes and smiled a half smile, leaning into her touch. El suddenly felt very emotional, the tension of the last few days catching up to her.

"Mike, that was a scary couple of days. I was afraid," she said, her hand still resting on his face.

Mike was silent but present - something he was so good at, being just what El needed.

"I missed you so much," she said thickly, her voice catching a bit, her eyes burning.

"I'm sorry, El," Mike said, looking wounded himself. He hated to hurt her, even unintentionally, or see her feeling this way.

The longer she looked at him the more her heart hurt, but she couldn't look away. Not when she didn't know how much time she had left to look at him. She didn't even want to blink.

Instead, she clutched at the front of his robe and said what she had said so many times before, the fear more real than it had ever been.

"Don't leave me."

Mike took her hand in his own, kissed it tenderly, and then placed their clasped hands gently over her heart. "Never," he said, and the tears that pricked El's eyes finally spilled out.

Mike rubbed the back of her hand gently. "Don't cry, El. I'll be okay." He leaned his forehead toward hers, and their noses bumped together like they had so many times.

El pressed her lips to his in a chaste kiss, and when she pulled away she stayed as close as they had been before.

"I love you, Mike," she whispered.

Mike's lips curled into a contented smile, his eyes closed from their kiss. "I love you too, El. So much."

Silent tears fell down her cheeks. She was not ready to end this conversation, or to stop hearing his voice. "I love you more," she said.

"Not possible," he insisted.

"It's true."

"Absolutely not."

"Mike!" El huffed, though she was enjoying their banter, "can you just let me have the last word, for once?"

Mike opened his eyes then, and they shone with amusement. "Have I ever?"

They both giggled, moving slightly closer together, if it was even possible. They had always been drawn to each other, and never liked much distance between them, at the beginning and still now. Especially now.

Taking advantage of his alert state, El leaned back slightly to look into his eyes and say what she had been wanting to tell him for the last two days.

"Thank you, Mike, for the most incredible life. It's been more than I could have ever imagined."

Mike's eyes held an emotion that could not be put into words. "Thank you, my love, for bringing me more joy than I ever thought I deserved. I will always love you."

"Me too," El vowed. "Promise."

"Promise," he said, pulling her to him, forehead to forehead, hand to heart, breath to breath.

Hours later, the nurse found them - foreheads pressed together, hands clasped, breath gone.

Together, always together, to the very end.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank for you coming on this journey with me! It means so much to me that you read it. I love your comments, they give me life and inspire me to keep writing. Now lets all cry together.